

positions and to take concrete actions to achieve peace.

America is committed, and I am personally committed, to implementing our roadmap toward peace. Our efforts are guided by clear principles: We believe that all people in the Middle East, Arab and Israeli alike, deserve to live in dignity under free and honest governments. We believe that people who live in freedom are more likely to reject bitterness, blind hatred, and terror, and are far more likely to turn their energy toward reconciliation, reform, and development.

There can be no peace for either side in the Middle East unless there is freedom for both. Reaching that destination will not be easy, but we can see the way forward. Now the parties must take that way, step by step, and America will be the active partner of every party that seeks true peace.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

## Statement on the Centennial Anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System *March 14, 2003*

One hundred years ago, President Theodore Roosevelt signed an Executive order that established America's first wildlife refuge in Pelican Island, Florida. His foresight and leadership have resulted in the world's largest network of dedicated lands to protect and manage a vast array of wildlife.

America's National Wildlife Refuge System spans 95 million acres of conservation lands and waters. With more than 540 refuges, there is a wildlife refuge within an hour's drive of every major city across America. More than 400 national wildlife refuges are open to the public, offering a variety of outdoor activities—including fishing, hunting, environmental education, wildlife observation, and photography—and making them special places for Americans to discover the wonders of nature. Many refuges offer additional opportunities for nature hikes, bird tours, wildlife drives, and other activities.

Our wildlife refuges have played a vital role in conserving and recovering our country's wildlife and vibrant natural resources. To maintain and improve our wildlife refuges, more than 34,000 volunteers generously donate more than 1.3 million service hours every year. These volunteers carry on the service inspired by Paul Kroegel, the volunteer who encouraged President Roosevelt's Executive order in 1903.

I have requested a \$26 million increase in the wildlife refuge system's budget for FY 2004. This request is on top of the historic \$56.5 million budget increase requested for this year. Congress also recognized the importance of the refuge system by including \$51 million of the request for 2003 in the recently enacted Omnibus Appropriations Act. Americans are proud of their wildlife refuge system, and we remain committed to continuing President Roosevelt's legacy.